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Communications.

AGAINST THE GENERAL USE OF SCIENTIFIC NAMES.

Mr. McGregor's "Plea for the General Use of Scientific Names" as set forth in our last BULLETIN, is, to my mind, illogical, and moreover expresses a sentiment which I am sure is far from prevalent among bird people. Let me say to start with, that I *do* recognize the necessity of scientific names, and for some of the very reasons Mr. McGregor gives. But I do not favor their general use in literature, either semi-popular or scientific, to the exclusion of vernacular names. To the "average person," take for example the Cooper Club membership, *Ardea virescens* may very obviously mean as much as Green Heron, and *Corvus americanus* as much as American Crow; but how about *Tachycineta thalassina*, *Helminthophila celata sordida* and *Hesperocichla nævia*, the common names of which are respectively, Violet-green Swallow, Dusky Warbler and Varied Thrush? Most of our intellects are far more capable of grasping and retaining a simple English name, as a great majority of our trivial names are, than the often complex and misapplied terms of Latin and Greek origin, with which languages we are not as familiar as are Mr. McGregor, Dr. Coues, Mr. D. G. Elliott and other philologists.

Mr. McGregor makes a statement which I very much doubt when he says "it is impossible to find enough common names to supply all the species of birds," even taking into consideration the avifauna of the whole world. Ornithology is a more popular study than that of many of the other animal classes. In fact, in entomology and palaeontology, scarcely any one but specialists are interested, and vernacular names are not needed except for the most familiar and wide-spread species. Hence I do not deem it inconsistent if birds are supplied with vernacular names, and certain other groups less familiarly known to the general public, are not.

In the cases of many North American birds, there are several scientific synonyms. That is no reason why one of them, complying with certain well-known laws of preference, should not

be selected as being the only recognized and tenable name. Correspondingly, among the numerous synonymous vernacular names of many of our common species is it not possible to select one, the best on account of appropriateness and most extended use, and recognize that one name as the only tenable one? This the A. O. U. Committee on Classification and Nomenclature has so far done. I know of but this one set of vernacular names for use in connection with our North American birds, the ones which this Committee have selected, just as with the scientific names. I would refer Mr. McGregor to Recommendation X of the A. O. U. Code of Nomenclature.

It is true that there are numerous trivial names on the A. O. U. Checklist now, which are taken directly from the Latin generic names, or are of barbarous origin. But these are mostly appropriate and of long standing so that they are now in familiar use. Similarly, there are many poor scientific names, barbarities, some of them mere combinations of letters with no meaning whatever. But according to the righteous law of priority they can never be changed. Appropriate English names when once adopted, should likewise become fixed and permanent.

I do not feel as Mr. McGregor does: I much prefer to see the vernacular name of a bird used in ordinary literature, rather than the Latin name. Supposing in the last BULLETIN, instead of our familiar bird names as used in J. M. W.'s delightful essay, the scientific names were in every case substituted! Instead of Meadowlark, *Sturnella*; Towhee, *Pipilo*; Lark Sparrow, *Chondestes*; Barn Swallow, *Hirundo*; Jay, *Cyanocitta*; etc. Would it have added to the value or accuracy of those poetical descriptions? The description of a woodland scene may be as scientific and accurate as the comparative measurements of the primaries of a warbler's wing. In either case where reference is made to a certain bird, shall we say *Dendroica* or Warbler? Which conveys the keenest idea of the bird in question to the "average person"? By the way, there are far more "half-scientists" who find pleasure in knowing something of

the relationship of animals," than specialists; and the more exclusive in their technical terms do the specialists become, the less can the average person understand of their work and writings.

I see no reason why it is not proper to give both the scientific and common names in faunal lists. If a person is more familiar with the vernacular names, he is better and sooner able to understand what species are recorded, than if only the scientific names are given. Mr. McGregor is the first person I ever heard of who is bothered by the vernacular names. I think it is the rule that "the average person" learns the common names of birds first, and then gradually acquires the scientific names.

If we should adopt the exclusive use of scientific names in our lists and semi-popular ornithological journals, a large class of readers would be greatly inconvenienced, and I see nothing to be gained. Uniformity and permanence are just as possible with common as with scientific names, and, in the study of ornithology, we need both.

JOSEPH GRINNELL.

Pasadena, Cal.



Book Reviews.

NEWTON'S DICTIONARY OF BIRDS. By Prof. Alfred Newton; pp. 1088; profusely illustrated; 1 map, New York, Macmillan Co. \$5.

This superb work on ornithology which was originally published in four parts, the last of which was completed in 1896, is now offered the public in one unabridged volume, at a moderate price, and every working ornithologist must hail the advent of such an edition with pleasure. To Club members who have not seen this admirable work it is well to state that it is everything and more than its name implies,—an encyclopædia of ornithological terms and facts, both common and technical, and a work which the novice or scientist may alike peruse with interest and to advantage. Any ornithologist will find within its pages much to interest and instruct in spare moments, for it is most readable aside from its value as a reference work, and for the latter use, it leaves nothing to be desired.

Thus, as a "dictionary" of ornithological topics, the present volume easily takes front rank in the available ornithological literature of to-day. The volume is a reprint of the four previously issued parts, all of which is preceded by a most valuable introduction (pp. 1-120), which constitutes an interesting history of ornithology from the first published writings of Aristotle (385-322 B. C.) to the present day. To

the ornithologist who studies his science for the simple love of it, how interesting it is to follow its progress from the time of its inception as a science, down through the ages! To those who are so interested we recommend the "Dictionary." The work is compiled with the topics alphabetically arranged, which is doubtless the most acceptable form for working ornithologists who appreciate a ready reference work. In the "Dictionary" are treated bird species and kindred subjects, such as geographical distribution, migration, moult, muscular system, nidification, vascular system, etc., *ad infinitum*. The various portions of bird anatomy are also treated in their respective places and seemingly every subject which might present itself to the naturalist is perfectly handled, leaving nothing to be desired. In the preface the author states "It has been my object throughout to compress into the smallest compass the information intended to be conveyed," and to the fact that this has been observed, is largely due the excellence of the entire work.—C. B.



THE A. O. U. MEETING.

The Seventeenth Congress of the A. O. U. held at the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, Nov. 13-16, was notable for several reasons. It was the first time in the history of the Union that a meeting has been held elsewhere than in New York, Washington or Cambridge, while the total attendance of members, as well as the number of papers presented, was greater than ever before.

The most noteworthy features of the programme were the numerous papers dealing with the question of moult and feather structure, and the wonderful excellence of modern bird photography as shown by lantern slides. Dr. Roberts' series of pictures of Franklin's Gull on its nesting grounds has probably never been surpassed. Every phase of the life of the bird was shown, and the parent was actually photographed while dropping an escaped young bird back into the nest!

Besides the regular programme, the members attended the meeting of the Academy on Tuesday evening and Mr. F. M. Chapman made a communication on the "Bird Rocks of the Gulf of St. Lawrence." On Friday a number of members visited "Mill Grove," the former home of Audubon, where they were entertained by Mr. Wetherill, the present owner.



The Annual Meetings of both divisions of the Cooper Club, held respectively in Pasadena and Santa Clara, were by far the most successful and enthusiastic sessions held by either division in recent years. This shows which way the wind is blowing in California, and this amalgamation of kindred spirits is a most happy thing to contemplate.